

Why Children Need Playhouses

August 12, 2015

The Wall Street Journal:

My backyard playhouse didn't have a turret. Or a Palladian window. Or AC or running water or the stained-glass windows found in the \$30,000 miniature mansions that some parents are having custom-built for their offspring these days. My own parents clearly didn't care much what my playhouse looked like: It was a sagging, wooden moving crate, maybe 5 feet tall and open at one end, that they'd salvaged, plopped beside the prickly raspberry bushes behind our suburban Alberta home, and painted a muddy '70s brown.

They showed even less interest in what my three neighborhood friends and I did within it.

Which is a good thing, given that our pursuits inside those splintery walls were obsessive and at times fiendish, though almost 100% administrative. We played office—at least our 9-year-olds' attempt to approximate cutthroat, hierarchical corporate culture. We gave ourselves titles—I was president—and urbane alter-egos. Over the several summers this elaborate game unfolded, I went by “Mike Keohane” (the surname borrowed from the rich kids at school), “Will Steinberg” (my stab at New York-style glamour) and “Jonathan” something-or-other. Our company was called BS&B, just like the oil-equipment-supply business my mom toiled for, so we could co-opt invoice forms she brought home, but in a bold rebranding exercise, we decided the initials stood for “Bulls**t & Barf.”

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